

Dedicatory Letter

Niccolò Machiavelli to the Magnificent Lorenzo de' Medici:

It is customary most of the time for those who desire to acquire favor¹ with a Prince to come to meet him with things that they care most for among their own or with things that they see please him most. Thus, one sees them² many times being presented with horses, arms, cloth of gold, precious stones and similar ornaments worthy of their greatness. Thus, since I desire to offer myself to your Magnificence³ with some testimony of my homage⁴ to you, I have found nothing in my belongings that I care so much for and esteem so greatly as the knowledge of the actions of great men, learned by me from long experience with modern things and a continuous reading of ancient ones. Having thought out and examined these things with great diligence for a long time, and now reduced them to one small volume, I send it to your Magnificence.

And although I judge this work undeserving of your presence, yet I have much confidence that through your humanity it may be accepted, considering that no greater gift could be made by me than to give you the capacity to be able to understand in a very short time all that I have learned

1. lit.: acquire grace. "Acquire" is an economic term that NM often uses to refer to noneconomic gain, especially conquest—here, to the favor or grace that would seem to be in the gift of a prince.

2. NM switches from a singular to the plural, a device he uses frequently.

3. Lorenzo de' Medici (1492–1519), grandson of Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449–92); he became duke of Urbino in 1516. NM had at first intended to dedicate *The Prince* to Giuliano de' Medici, son of Lorenzo the Magnificent and duke of Nemours, who died in 1516. See NM's letter to Vettori of December 10, 1513, printed in the Appendix.

4. *servitù*, a feudal term of submission elsewhere to be translated as "servitude."

and understood in so many years and with so many hardships and dangers for myself. I have not ornamented this work, nor filled it with fulsome phrases nor with pompous and magnificent words, nor with any blandishment or superfluous ornament whatever, with which it is customary for many to describe and adorn their things. For I wanted it either not to be honored for anything or to please solely for the variety of the matter and the gravity of the subject. Nor do I want it to be reputed presumption if a man from a low and mean state dares to discuss and give rules for the governments of princes. For just as those who sketch landscapes place themselves down in the plain to consider the nature of mountains and high places and to consider the nature of low places place themselves high atop mountains, similarly, to know well the nature of peoples one needs to be prince, and to know well the nature of princes one needs to be of the people.

Therefore, your Magnificence, take this small gift in the spirit⁵ with which I send it. If your Magnificence considers and reads it diligently, you will learn from it my extreme desire that you arrive at the greatness that fortune and your other qualities promise you. And if your Magnificence will at some time turn your eyes from the summit of your height to these low places, you will learn how undeservedly I endure a great and continuous malignity of fortune.

5. *animo* refers to the “spirit” with which human beings defend themselves, never to a capacity for self-detachment (*anima*, “soul,” does not occur in *The Prince*). It can also mean “mind” in the sense of “intent,” but not in the sense of “intellect.”